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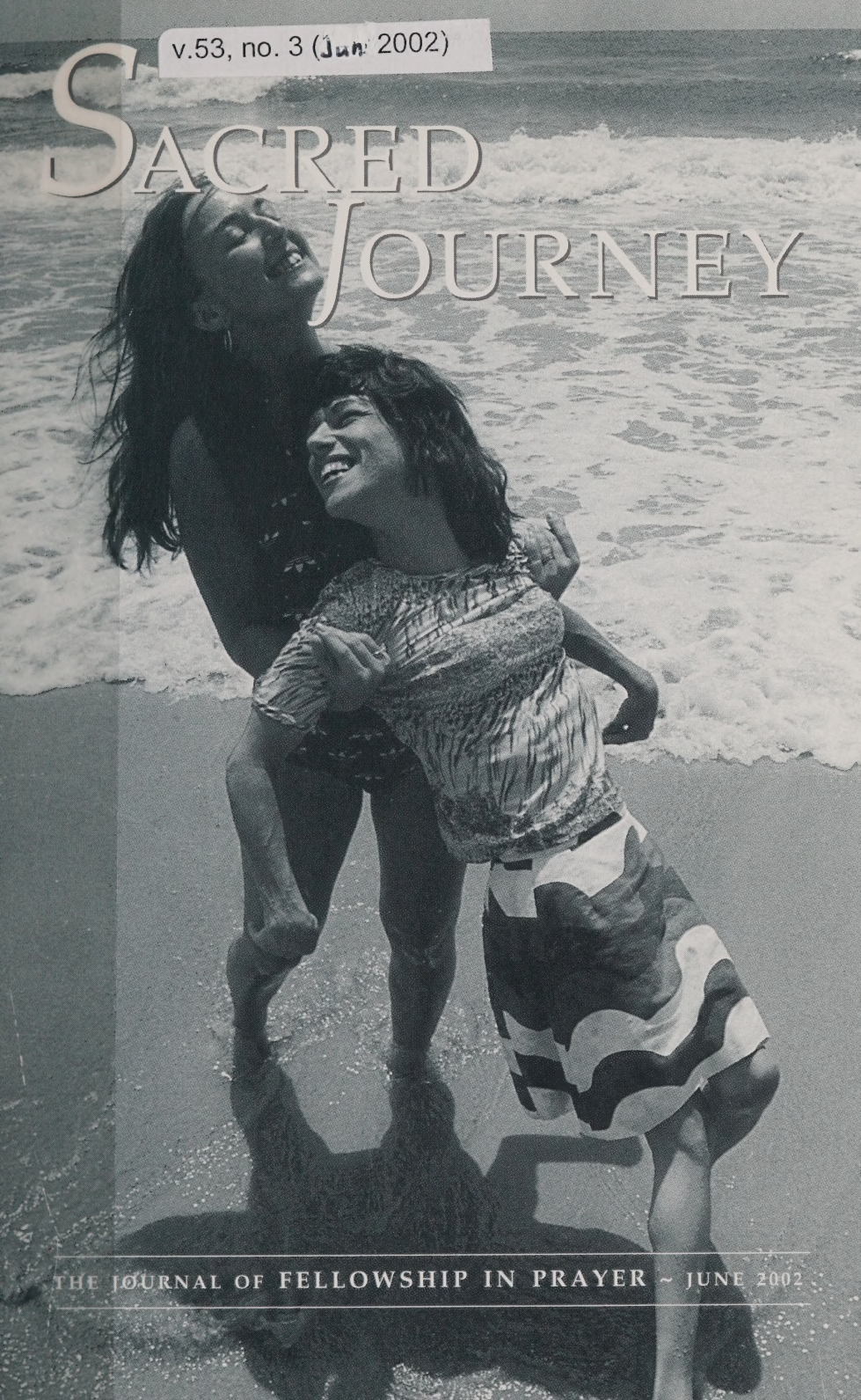
SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ JUNE 2002

SACRED JOURNEY®

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

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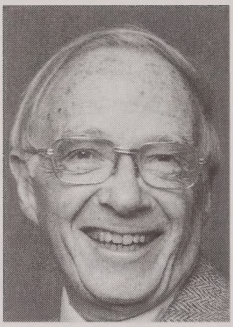
Cover photo by Abraham Menashe.

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP



Brother Wayne Teasdale, a lay monk who combines the traditions of Christianity and Hinduism—and who will lead two workshops at this month's "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference in Princeton—has written movingly about spiritual friendship in his new book, *A Monk in the World: Cultivating a Spiritual Life*. Here, in part, is what he says:

> Friendship meets a human need to be nourished and comforted by the companionship, laughter, and the wisdom of others. We benefit greatly when we are among people with whom we enjoy sharing time. . . .
>
> The nourishing, comforting social qualities of friendship, qualities that define this extraordinary human relationship, are universal requirements of a healthy bond of affection in whatever corner of the planet we happen to find ourselves. In our frenetic existence, however, with its emphasis on individuality and absence of meaningful community, we are often left devoid of the deeper richness and texture friendship gives us. We are like refugees adrift in our mass culture, with its anonymity and lack of opportunities. We need friendships as much as we need community, and we require both, because they complete us in an essential way, contributing to our intellectual, moral, psychological, and spiritual maturity. Others complete us

because we all share the same mysterious Self, or Spirit. . . .

An orientation to the Sacred makes a foundation on which lasting friendship can be built. Interest in, seeking of, and commitment to the Sacred, the Divine, in whatever form it may assume, provides the ultimate measure of growth in the lives of friends and within friendship itself. Orientation to the Divine, to God and the spiritual journey, opens up an eternal dimension to the friendship and permits a depth of sharing that doesn't happen at sports events, the theater, concerts, dances, or bars, where conversations tend to be limited to the popular culture of games, politics, or the movies. The spiritual journey, the mystical life, presents an ultimate context for the guidance of our friends and all our relationships to occur. It grants us a focus, a destiny, and a container for our personal spiritual evolution that is lacking in many other spheres of life.

One of the most enduring rewards of attending the "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference in Princeton this month will be the opportunity to make deeply nourishing spiritual friendships. Among the hundreds of spiritual seekers—of many different faith traditions, or none—you will meet and talk with many new companions on the sacred journey who share your hopes and fears, your beliefs and doubts, your joys and sorrows; women and men with whom you will form lasting bonds of spiritual friendship.

Even if you can't make it to Princeton this month, be open and alert to the opportunity to make spiritual friendships as you go about your daily life. Be sensitive to the dimension of spirituality in people you meet, people who act out of compassion and love. Their friendship will be deep and lasting.

Excerpt from A Monk in the World *©2002 by Wayne Teasdale. Reprinted with permisison of New World Library,* www.newworldlibrary.com .

SING, JUST SING

If by magic I were given three wishes, one would be for a voice to raise in robust praise. Yeah, I can carry a tune but I marvel when a singer can reach me from platform or stage with just the strength of her breath and the power of her voice. Such a gift!

But the ability to praise—to glorify, worship, affirm with awe—requires no talent. The only requisite is a purity of desire and openness of heart. You've probably experienced as I have the lift, the sublime embrace that sometimes happens when joining voice and spirit in song. Gospel singer Alice Williams, the subject of our lead article this month, explains this phenomenon this way: "Gospel music can't bring you closer to heaven, but it can make you feel like you are there."

Most of us rarely pay attention to either the physical or the spiritual side of singing. Sound, those vibrations of energy that thrum through our vocal chords and make sound, produce visceral sensations. A loud yell on a snow-packed mountain can cause an avalanche and a high-pitched aria can break glass. Likewise, music can and will unpack and break down hardened places inside of us. As we sing, our breathing deepens and slows. Muscles often relax and skin temperatures change and our emotions are unleashed. Our scattered attentions become focused.

When we sing, we become centered—life-giving air moves into the center of our bodies and returns as praise. Indeed singing is a spiritual practice fully utilized by nearly all of the world's faith traditions.

Sister Alice will serve up a taste of gospel music's glory at our "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference on June 14-16. Those drawn to the mystical sounds of the harp will want to join harpist Mairead Doherty and Father Timothy Joyce, the author of "Adventurers of the Spirit," in the Celtic Christianity workshop at the conference. Even if you can't make the journey to Princeton this year, rest assured there is much to enjoy in these pages. In *Spirituality & Everyday Life* Joni Woelfel outlines the legacy she wants to leave to her children in "Proverbs for Life." Let Joni inspire you to list some simple truths you have learned the hard way so others may benefit from your life. If you or one you love faces an illness, Lorraine V. Murray will lead you to the door in your heart that adversity can open.

Perhaps you are tired and in need of stillness and a deeper connection with nature as Maureen Killoran was when she embarked on a vision quest. In the Utah desert she discovered a connectedness with all creation. Sybil Harp retells the story of taking her thirteen-year-old granddaughter to a World War II memorial in France. She wonders if seeing the ravages of the past might teach this citizen of the future about the wonderful but fragile nature of life. Sant Rajinder Singh describes how meditation can reveal a "reservoir of peace within." And if a vacation is in your plans for coming weeks, consider packing this issue—the poems and prayers are worth pondering—along with a copy of one of the *Books We've Enjoyed*. Whatever your summer plans, make it a point to listen to the music in your life. Let it lift and refresh you—body and soul.

Alice Williams

Meet Sister Alice Williams

Rebecca Laird

The B. M. Oakley Memorial Temple is a brick-faced jewel hidden in an afflicted urban North Philadelphia neighborhood. Decaying buildings and littered empty lots surround the church but inside and upstairs in the sanctuary there is nothing but sound and light. On a late winter Sunday, I walked through the doors with my family and was ushered into the second row of royal blue pews. One beautiful young woman dressed in a violet suit took a microphone in hand and began to sing, "My soul says, Yes, Yes, Yes..." then two more joined in. A drummer sat down in front of a trap set and picked up his sticks. The electric keyboard and organ keyed in. Other vocalists strolled forward until half a dozen sang out with such energy that the air crackled. We sang for nearly an hour just to get warmed up. I swayed, clapped, and let my spirit ascend. Several of the praise songs were familiar from my childhood although they were now rendered with more power, more soul, more urgency than I recall, but to my spirit, I was simply home.

Alice Williams will lead a workshop on gospel singing for Fellowship in Prayer's "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference to be held June 14-16, 2002. She is the assistant pastor of B.M. Oakley Memorial Temple in Philadelphia. Rebecca Laird is the editor of SACRED JOURNEY.

In due time several dozen children took the platform. This was their service. They would provide the message, a reenactment of African-American history and their spiritual tradition in skit and song, dance and poem. Behind the scenes, I later learned, Sister Alice Williams, the assistant pastor who oversees both the music and youth departments, was helping to deliver cues and direct the children to the platform on time. Midway through the service a young girl of perhaps nine or ten years of age recited flawlessly from a few feet in front of me. She looked me squarely in the eyes as she spoke and I was inspired by an inner fire that reflected in her eyes. When instructed to greet others in the congregation with a handshake, this girl took my hand and said, "I rise!" with firmness. Someone had instilled in her an unshakable belief in her worth as a child of God. I saw it and felt it and I wanted it for my children, for me, and for all of us who sometimes wonder if we matter in this world.

Later, in a telephone conversation, I asked Sister Alice how she uses music as a tool to shape the young people in her church. She said, "Music helps to build up their confidence. It's amazing how it awakens creativity. Music is the one way you can express yourself where nobody will hold it against you. There is no explanation needed. The confidence level that rises in the young people is phenomenal and it doesn't just affect that one area of their life but it's a psychological thing—you build their confidence in music but it spills out not only into church but in their school work and in their confidence in their goals. Music is another way to keep them in touch with themselves."

These aren't just the platitudes of a committed youth

minister—these are the words of life to Sister Alice. She was first brought to this church as an infant. Today four generations of her family worship at B. M. Oakley Memorial Temple—three of those young musicians who led the praise and worship in the service I attended are her children. Alice's newest tiny grandchild was rocked in the first row.

Alice says, "I did not come from a rich family. I came up very hard. I was a single parent. I used to be strung out on drugs. That's why I love to work with young people. When young ladies can see the hope that is in me and can see my children are all grown and all successful, it lets them know that just because they are raising their children by themselves that does not mean that they have to end up in the jailhouse or be the lesser of anybody. My favorite saying is that 'I'm a survivor.' The young people tease me because they hear me say it so often, but I like people to know that. People see where you are and think you've always been that. I know that I've had to get through many crises to be where I am. I have a long way to go but I am not without hope. When I tell people that I used to be strung out on drugs and that I used to drink they say, 'No, not you.' And I say, yes that used to be me when I was eighteen to twenty years old. I am a firm believer and a living example that you do not have to become a product of your environment. I constantly tell people that. No matter what is in your bloodline, you don't have to become that."

What Sister Alice has become is a woman able to motivate many across racial, cultural, and age boundaries. During the week she acts as the financial officer for the church-sponsored Maria Gardner School from kindergarten to sixth grade and administrator for the day care

that serves forty-five babies and toddlers from the neighborhood. In the evenings and weekends she oversees the music and youth programs for the church congregation which numbers 800 members. Some weekends she travels with an evangelist and leads thousands in praise and worship. Each summer she returns to Omega Institute for Holistic Studies in Rhinebeck, New York, which is perhaps the largest and most eclectic spiritual retreat center in the country, where she first went as a backup singer for the legendary gospel singer Marion Williams, another member of B.M. Oakley Temple. Marion sang and Alice provided the motivational talks that stem from her own life of deep faith and hard knocks.

Gospel music can't bring you closer to heaven, but it can make you feel like you are there.

I asked Sister Williams what happens when people unfamiliar with gospel music come to her workshops for the first time. She told me, "People cry because they can feel the spirit in this. It brings about a sense of peace. I remember a young lady who came to one of my workshops who had very, very low self-esteem. She was very introverted and shy. She spent a week at Omega with me and I don't just teach the gospel songs, I give motivational speeches and share experiences I've had in my life. By the end of the week she was able to talk about her pain. She got in touch with her pain through gospel music and it began a healing process. And that was one of my most rewarding things. Every year she comes back to the workshops and she's very happy. It changed her whole countenance."

It would be easy for someone with the rare talent and zeal of Sister Alice to be tempted to let her deep and wide

voice take her places far from her North Philly home, but she knows where home is. She says, "It's a blessing to know that you have imparted hope and strength in someone else's life. I really can't think of anything else I would want to do than what I am doing now. When I leave this earth here, I'll know that my life will have made an impact on someone else's life. And that is really why we are here. We are not here for ourselves. We are here for each other. I am a firm believer in that. We are here to make an impact on each other and to change each other's lives."

To that my soul says, Yes, Yes, Yes.

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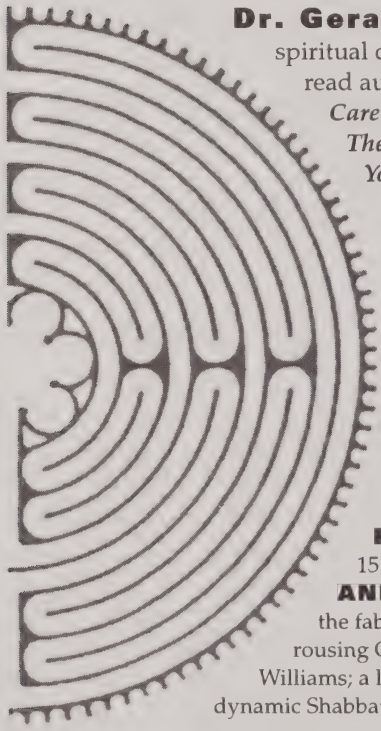

Dr. Gerald (Jerry) May,
spiritual director, psychiatrist and widely-read author of *Addiction and Grace, Care of Mind/Care of Spirit,* and *The Awakened Heart: Opening Yourself to the Love You Need*

and

Joan Borysenko,
a leading authority on women's spirituality and author of best-selling books, *A Woman's Book of Life, Minding the Body/Mending the Mind, A Woman's Journey to God,* and *Seven Paths to God: The Ways of the Mystic*

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Subscribers and attendees at *last* year's conference will receive a brochure, registration form and complete details by the the end of March 2002.
To be added to the list, e-mail us at **heck@sacredjourney.org.** or write to us at 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08542-3227.

Adventurers of the Spirit

Timothy J. Joyce

Brendan the Navigator (486-578) was born near Tralee in western Ireland and is honored as the patron saint of Kerry. Tutored by Saints Ita and Finnigan, he is said to have spent some time in both Wales and Scotland before settling as a hermit on the top of Mount Brandon, the second highest peak in Ireland. This mountain, rising directly from the sea for 3127 feet, towers over the adjacent areas and is often shrouded in mist. Here Brendan must have looked out at the open sea. Flowing down from the mountain and into the sea is Brandon Creek. Its harbor is supposed to be the place from which Brendan went forth on his sea voyages. At this point legend takes over from history. The ninth-century tale of

Timothy Joyce, a Benedictine monk of Irish descent, is prior of the Glastonbury Abbey, Hingham, Massachusetts. He will lead a workshop on Celtic Christianity at the "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference to be held June 14-16, 2002. This excerpt is reprinted by permission from Celtic Christianity *©1998 by Timothy J. Joyce, published by Orbis Books. This book and* Celtic Quest, *also by Timothy Joyce, are available from your local bookstore or by calling 1-800-258-5838 or visiting the Orbis website,* www.maryknoll.org.

his journeys, *The Navigatio*, describes his fantastic explorations. The text of this tale survives in 120 manuscripts and is the basis of the legend of his trip to North America. This delightful book became immensely popular in medieval times. One charming episode is about the Easter Mass celebrated on a small island in the ocean. At the end of Mass the island moved and Brendan and his companions discovered they had been on the back of a whale.

In 559 Brendan founded a monastery at Clonfert in County Galway. Later a cathedral was built on the site and still exhibits a wonderful twelfth-century Romanesque doorway with carved heads of many saints, including Brendan. Tradition says that this was the burial place of Brendan. Next to the present cathedral is a lay community called the Emmanuel House of Prayer.

Brendan was an adventurer, willing to take risks and to explore the unknown. This Celtic propensity to go on pilgrimage was not so much a missionary or evangelistic undertaking but rather a means to follow Christ. Other monks adopted this practice in various ways. Going off to sea in a *currach* (small boat), setting oneself adrift without oars and letting the wind determine one's destination was an expression of this wandering and self-abandonment that characterized "white martyrdom." Brendan's story, *The Navigatio*, served as an example of this impulse to wander and identified life as a spiritual journey. *The Navigatio* is a spiritual odyssey, similar to those of the Greek *Ulysses*, the Latin *Aeneid*, and the later Arthurian stories of the search for the Grail. It is an archetype of the call many of us still hear today to leave all and follow Christ, to take the narrow road, to set out and not look back, to risk losing our life so we may find it.

Still another expression of the monastic impulse,

indicative of both search and penance, was the desire to push to one's limit, to place oneself physically out as far as one could go in trust of the caring God. This tendency is exemplified in the remoteness of some monastic sites and particularly visible in the choice of Skellig Michael, an island easily identified by a huge double peak of rock soaring upward out of the sea some seven miles off the Kerry coast from Valencia. Under the patronage of Michael the Archangel, this place would certainly need an angel's protection in a storm! The wonderful monastic remains still found at Skellig Michael date back to the sixth century, and the name of Saint Finan is associated with its foundation. Monks inhabited this wild refuge for five centuries through the Viking invasions—the last historical evidence of monks inhabiting the site comes from the eleventh century.

Wandering and self-abandonment were a part of the spiritual journey.

Since 1992 the modern Skellig Experience Visitor Center in Valencia introduces people to the unique history, folklore, and wildlife of the Skelligs, both the smaller Skellig with its mammoth population of gannets and other birds, and the larger one, Skellig Michael, with its monastic remains. I was fortunate enough, with the weather permitting, to get a ride out to the island with a boatman from the village of Portmagee. He left our little group off at this wondrous site and allowed us a few hours to climb and explore it. Here we beheld six corbelled beehive huts, two boat-shaped oratories, stone crosses, slabs, and graves, plus a later, medieval church. We gazed on the remains of the terraced garden where monks grew their food.

Standing on this height I called to mind the words of Jacob in the book of Genesis (28:17), "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Indeed the site, the views, the feeling of this place was awesome. It far exceeded many better-known shrines I have visited throughout the Christian world. An interpretive guide helped us to appreciate the site. He gave some background and mentioned that these monks were considered to be very important and essential to the people on the mainland. Monks at prayer and penance were appreciated as a significant part of the social fabric. This is an important insight to a vision where the sacred and the secular were intertwined and spiritual realities were part of mundane, everyday life. I would like to hope my life as a monk would be considered as helpful and fruitful to Christian people today as the lives of the monks of Skellig were back then.

❖ ❖ ❖

A Portion from Saint Brendan's Prayer

Shall I abandon, O King of mysteries, the soft comforts of home?
Shall I turn my back on my native land, and turn my face towards the sea?
. . . Shall I leave the prints of my knees on the sandy beach,
a record of my final prayer in my native land?
. . . Shall I take my tiny boat across the wide sparkling ocean?
O King of the Glorious Heaven, shall I go of my own choice upon the sea?
O Christ, will You help me on the wild waves?

~ascribed to Saint Brendan the Navigator

Proverbs for Life

Joni Woelfel

Many years ago while attending a retreat, I was asked to write the legacy I would like to leave my children and loved ones. I have updated and changed it through the years, but below is my legacy.

❖ ❖ ❖

Be gentle with others. Don't expect them to think or believe as you do, because they won't. You'll only be disappointed and disillusioned if you set unrealistic expectations of others.

❖ ❖ ❖

Remember there is a gray side to almost every black and white issue; in other words, things are never as cut and dried as you might think they are.

Joni Woelfel, a frequent contributor to SACRED JOURNEY, is a mother of grown children who lives in Minnesota. This excerpt is from Tall in Spirit: Meditations for the Chronically Ill, *published by ACTA Publications, 4848 North Clark Street, Chicago, IL 60640-4711 and is used by permission.*

❖ ❖ ❖

If you put your life or other people's lives in molds or boxes and think you know all the answers, you are in for a tremendous fall. Don't shortchange yourself; always make room for new thoughts and the people who bring them.

❖ ❖ ❖

Never allow yourself to grow bitter. It will ruin your health and drive away your most loyal friends. Don't be so easy on yourself that you grow soft, but always be patient with yourself. Honor the processes at work within you. Always set realistic personal goals so that you have something to work for and look forward to. Feeling disappointed about who you wish you could be or repeatedly regretting things you can't change is a waste of time. Do your best and leave it at that.

❖ ❖ ❖

A good way to help those who are searching for wholeness is to keep reminding them that they have worth. Tell loved ones how special they are. Be stingy with advice. Always remind yourself to build others up, no matter what your own limitations are. In doing so you build up yourself.

❖ ❖ ❖

Strive to maintain the personal maturity that allows you to see beyond yourself. You can measure your inner growth by the tolerance you have for others who rub you the wrong way. Guard your mouth and weigh your words.

❖ ❖ ❖

Expect to make mistakes. When you go through an inner tempest, don't trust your feelings alone. Nothing can create false perspectives better than out-of-control emotions. Beware of making decisions when you are lacking a calm spirit, because you will more than likely regret it later.

❖ ❖ ❖

Recognize the times when stress is destroying your hope. Regroup and gather back that which saves you. Your instincts will tell you what you need to know and do.

❖ ❖ ❖

Don't start new projects or inner seasons without finishing the ones at hand, lest you grow discouraged without the gratification of completion or closure.

❖ ❖ ❖

Pay attention to the circumstances, messages, and people who come into your life.

❖ ❖ ❖

Take inner discernment seriously, and always follow the threads of it. Understand that the subtle is as much an element of God's voice as is the dramatic.

In the end, you will find that life is a process of three things: believing in yourself, believing in others, and believing in God. Realize that it is your privilege and responsibility to be true to the unfolding. When hardship and suffering come, delve as deeply as you can into the vast inner universe of resources that lies beneath the struggle. Trust that the sacredness within you will hold you up. Breathe it, pray it, embrace it. Let go, expand and float.

A Prayer for the Last Lap

Marge Dwyer

Please God:

Don't let me keep clothes that are too long, short, big or small
I have plenty to wear for the places I go.
You know my family lived through the Great Depression
so help me from saving the receipts of every single thing
I have bought in the last twenty years.

And although I think they're pretty
Let me throw out all my mismatched china,
also broken crockery, frayed extension cords,
and drapery hooks from three houses ago,
and that means outdated dress patterns, too.

'Cause I'm in a race that is almost over
and I'm putting my house in order.
When I arrive at your place please know that
I tried very hard to be a good daughter,
a good wife and a good mother.

Marge Dwyer writes profiles on older residents for The Lawrenceville Ledger. *She is a member of the Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville, New Jersey, but in the summer when she gardens, she attends the church of the pines where she sends up many a prayer.*

Don't let me be remembered as a whiner
even though I do it very well.
Better yet, when they come to go over my things
let them be enchanted by my daffodils and daylillies
lovingly prepared to continue the trip without me.

Our Sleeping Bodies

Robert Louis Stevenson

We resign into your hands our sleeping bodies, our cold hearths and open doors. Give us to awaken with smiles, give us to labour smiling. As the sun returns in the east, so let our patience be renewed with dawn; as the sun lightens the world, so let our loving kindness make bright this house of our habitation.

Be Thou My Vision

Traditional Irish Hymn

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
Naught be all else to me save that thou art,
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

A Secret Door in My Heart

Lorraine V. Murray

I spotted the woman the moment I walked into the hospital lobby. Shaking and sobbing uncontrollably, she was talking to someone on the phone. I couldn't hear what she was saying, yet I felt a strong urge to comfort her. But something stopped me. She's a stranger, I reminded myself, and it's none of your business. I didn't want to be late for my appointment, so I hurried down the hall.

My yearly mammogram had shown suspicious areas. I was here this morning to see a surgeon about performing a biopsy on my breast.

After the operation was scheduled, my friends and family members rallied around me. Everyone told me I was in their prayers. Everyone encouraged me with scriptural verses.

"Ask and you will receive," one enthused. "If you pray in Jesus' name," another assured me, "you will receive healing."

This article first appeared as "A Change of Heart" in America, *a Catholic magazine. Lorraine V. Murray also writes columns for the* Atlanta Journal-Constitution. *Her first book,* Grace Notes, *was published this past spring by Resurrection Press,* www.resurrectionpress.com.

And so I prayed. While gardening, while showering, while driving. I did more than that— I shamelessly begged God for a good outcome. By the day of the biopsy, I was so wracked with worry I'd lost five pounds. After the procedure, I went home to collapse on my bed and storm heaven some more.

Two days later, the surgeon called to deliver the news that would change my life forever. The biopsy had shown the presence of cancer. As I wept over the phone, he assured me that in six months, I would look back and be glad I'd had the mammogram. But all I could remember was my mother's face as she lay dying of breast cancer. And I cried again.

As I told the dreadful news to all the people who'd been praying for me, I began to feel that perhaps I'd done something terribly wrong. Maybe I'd missed some vital part of the prayer formula. Maybe I didn't have the proper relationship with God. Worst of all, maybe he didn't love me enough to answer my pleas for healing.

These were agonizing thoughts. I began a mental journey into my past to probe my relationship with God. As a child, I'd been spoon-fed an image of God as an old man in the sky with a long, white beard. The nuns had told me God was our heavenly father, but that was little help for me. My earthly father was emotionally distant, a man so puzzled by the whole parenting endeavor that he rarely showed his daughters any affection. I hoped my heavenly father wasn't as standoffish.

Later I discovered that many religions defined God as love. Since God had no limits, I figured that his love would be boundless too. It would be a pure unconditional love, I decided. This made sense

Sara Wuthnow

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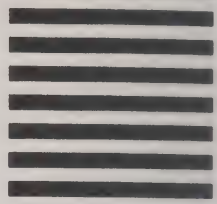

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to me, although it was hard to imagine how it would feel to be so loved. In my childhood, love had been doled out with strings attached. If I got gold stars on my spelling tests, my mom toasted my success. If I brought home a "B," she seemed disappointed.

When I learned about Jesus, I was truly comforted. Here was a man of fiery, swelling emotions, a man who passionately celebrated life. He loved his friends, embraced children, cherished the suffering masses. He gave us a new commandment and it was all about love.

But Christ suffered the most horrible death imaginable. And he had the added burden of knowing the exact details ahead of time. That he'd be slowly tortured and nailed to a cross. That he'd suffocate in the broiling sun. That there'd be no relief for his pain.

No wonder he sweated blood the night before his death. No wonder he pleaded with his father to "take the cup from me." Still, he realized that prayers are requests, not demands, and so he added: "Not my will, but thy will be done."

Like Christ, I've done my share of begging.

"Please, dear God," I've whimpered, "don't let this be cancer."

But now the cup has been passed to me and I've reluctantly taken a sip. The taste is bitter, just as I feared. But I keep reminding myself that Christ tapped into new life after his agony, and perhaps I will experience some sort of enlightenment myself.

Maybe, in some small ways, it's already happening. Until recently, I've been pretty skilled at avoiding the suffering masses. Oh, I did my share of volunteer work, but it was all tidy and neat. When it came down to brushing shoulders with the decrepit and dying, I fled. I

considered doing volunteer work at a local hospital, but I feared getting too involved emotionally.

Ironically enough, I'm now spending much of my time at that hospital. Since having the biopsy and surgery, the medical center has become a second home. And lately it's becoming more difficult for me to block out the faces of the worried, broken people who stream endlessly through the doors. People facing surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy. People trembling in fear. People just like me.

I still whine and complain about my illness. I still grieve for the days when I didn't have to struggle daily with the blues. But every so often, I notice some small secret door opening in my heart. It's a door that was sealed before.

And perhaps this is God's answer to my prayers. A heart that mysteriously is starting to awaken. A heart that may stretch larger over time.

Sometimes I envision the woman I saw that morning in the lobby. The woman who was sobbing into the phone. The next time I see someone in such distress, I won't miss my chance. I'll know just what to do. I'll brush aside my fears about impropriety and give her a big hug.

I don't think it will be that difficult to do. After all, that woman was me.

Thoughts on a Desert Ledge

Maureen Killoran

I've been a minister for fifteen years and alive for nearly sixty years. As a parish minister in a large and busy church, I'd accepted the standard model that activity is good. But as I worked hard, I sensed a longing to stop, to rest, to listen. How wise, it seemed to me, are the Native Americans who, as a matter of course, take time to listen to the deeper rhythm of the universe. I started to consider the possibility of a midlife vision quest and, once I did, life cooperated. Time became available. Somebody sent me a brochure about a vision quest in Utah.

And so I went, a Unitarian Universalist minister with only a limited knowledge of Native American traditions, preparing to fast for three days and three nights on the rim of Hell Roaring Canyon. Seventy-two hours is a long

Maureen Killoran is a Unitarian Universalist parish minister who holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from McCormick Theological Seminary and two degrees in family sociology. She is a photographer, a poet, a grandmother, and a lover of animals. She shares her life with her husband, Peter Hyatt, in Asheville, North Carolina.

time when all you have to do is find shelter, drink water, and survive. You sit. You walk. You wait. You chant. You pray. And you feel very, very alone.

Setting up camp was my first chore. I anchored my tarp to some rocks and one cliff-hanging tree so my shelter wouldn't sail off on the midnight wind. I secreted my precious water in a crevasse to protect it from the sun. I memorized the edges of the ledge I'd chosen as home. There was no need to hurry, and before long heat and hunger slowed me down even more. Drink water, I kept reminding myself, repeating the desert survival mantra: pee often, pee clear.

After dark the temperature dropped below freezing. I could hear nocturnal creatures doing creaturely things, and we weren't permitted a fire. I abandoned any pious intentions of keeping vigil, and pulled my sleeping bag up to my ears. The moon was full but definitely not friendly. Its light seemed to freeze in my eyes for what seemed like hours before I gave up and slept anyway. Dear God, let me survive this night, was all I could manage to pray.

By mid-morning of the second day, it was warm enough to venture forth, and I climbed down into the wash to explore, noting landmarks with uncharacteristic care. Occasionally I spotted a bandana signaling one of my colleague's camps. A raven flew past, and I could hear its wings flap. Gradually, I realized that, yes, I was isolated, but I was not alone. I wrote this in my journal:

> *I am in a place of constant movement . . . some episodic, as when huge boulders break loose and tumble down the gorge or when the canyon hosts the raging floods from which it got its name. Some of the movements are very slow, as in the work of*

Robert F. Campbell

roots and water that pry loose those hunks of granite and of shale. Slow as in the one-inch-per-century growth of the cryptogam, or the trees that take a decade even to inch above the soil. Lizards flit about, and hummingbirds, and even an eagle soars. The ants lug to their nest every scarce crumb they find. A scorpion rests under a rock, but lift that cover and she scuttles away. When the wind ceases, insects are everywhere. Timeless it is, but movement still through time. I am embedded in Life's relationship . . . if I can just be slow enough to see.

On my return trip from the wash, I spotted a pile of trash, rusty cans and old pans stashed under a rock. I picked up two cans and one pot lid and carried the load to my nest. My booty made my unfit body even more ungainly as I scrambled over boulders for several hundred feet. If you'd asked me ahead of time, I would have said I couldn't carry this load uphill. But at that moment it mattered enormously that I carry out at least a portion of that anonymous debris as an act of reparation toward the slow processes of the desert. Back in my perch, I turned again to my journal:

Radical Love . . . guides me in knowing that the child starving in the Sahara, the woman celebrating a birth in Melanesia, the man tortured in Brazil, all are part of me. I have a deep feeling of kinship with the little lizard that stopped to exchange stares and the tree that snapped when I pulled too tightly on the rope that anchors my tarp. Radical Love makes work for justice inevitable for God is present in this lizard, this tree, as surely as in the eyes of a stranger . . . or the heart of a friend.

As the Quaker founder George Fox said, "There is that of God in each of us." The desert taught me that we are all connected—not just with our human neighbors, not just with our species, but we are one with the sand and the cryptogam, the great whales and the Asian elephants, the mockingbirds and, yes, the bugs and the bacteria too. We are one with the mountains, and rivers and trees, and the great mystery of the beyond.

After the third day, I took down my shelter and thanked each branch and rock to which I had been connected. Saying final thanks to the tree that sheltered me from wind, I said aloud, "I owe you more than I have words to say." Perhaps I moved, but perhaps not. What I experienced was the tree reaching down and tweaking my hat from my head. And, as though spoken aloud, I heard a voice: *Your species always uses so many words. To listen, to love, that is enough.*

I went to the desert to learn to listen. I did not expect to hear the voice of a tree. But Native American elders say that what we need to know is already known by spirits wiser than we. Stop. Listen. Let go, and in life's oneness, you can learn to hear and to see.

ILLUMINATIONS

Faith is such a simple thing. It can't talk, but only sing. It can't reason, but can dance. Take a chance. Take a chance. Life is full of ways to go. Sun, rain, wind, snow. All unknowingly we trace a geography of grace. From breath to breath and blink to blink, it's never quite the way we think.

~Al Carmines

The Master once proposed a riddle: "What do the artist and the musician have in common with the mystic?"

Everyone gave up.

"The realization that the finest speech does not come from the tongue," said the Master.

~Anthony DeMello

The Master said, "Let a man be first incited by the Songs, then given a firm footing by the study of ritual, and finally perfected by music."

~Confucius

The Landscape of the Spirit requires a lung, but no Tongue.

~Emily Dickinson

Once at church one of the preachers got up in the pulpit and spoke out against me. I got right up, too. I told him I was born to sing gospel music. Nobody had to teach me. I

was serving God. I told him that I had been reading the Bible every day most of my life and there was a Psalm that said, "Oh, clap your hands, all you people! Shout unto the Lord with the voice of a trumpet!" If it was undignified, it was what the Bible told me to do.

~Mahalia Jackson

Religion is not something to be learned intellectually; it is an inner matter. When enlightenment comes, a light shines from inside revealing that everything is God. Then one sees God in the earth, the skies, in the whole universe.

~Baba Virsa Singh

Beauty is life when life unveils her holy face.

~Kahlil Gibran

Do not confine your children to your own learning for they were born in a different time.

~Hebrew Proverb

When there is stillness in the motion of our days, life's mysteries are revealed.

~Chinese adage

Believe one who has tried, you shall find a fuller satisfaction in the woods than in books. The trees and the rocks will teach you that which you cannot hear from masters.

~Bernard of Clairvaux

An Hour in Oradour

Sybil Harp

"Silence," reads a sign next to a plaque describing the events of June 10, 1944. Horrible, unspeakable events. Silence. Do not desecrate this place with words.

We pass through the gate. I wonder how this unexpected visit will affect Lindsay, the almost thirteen-year-old granddaughter I have brought with me on this trip. It is the ninth day of our tour. We have viewed Paris from the top of the Eiffel Tower, marveled at Notre Dame and Chartres, delighted in the riotous colors of Monet's garden at Giverney, and been charmed by French villages basking in the perpetual sunshine of our journey. On this day, as our bus carried us toward Limoges, our guide told the story of Oradour-sur-Glane. She realized that the village was not on the original tour itinerary, but perhaps we would like to stop there for an hour? Most of us on the bus were old enough to remember World War II. We voted to make the stop.

We are on the main street of the small village. Stone skeletons of houses. Bright sunshine on the dark ruins. Many

Sybil Harp is a retired magazine editor actively involved in an inner-city parish of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee. She is also an associate of the Racine Dominicans, a community devoted to Truth and Justice.

people are walking there, silent and sober. One hears only the soft crunch of footsteps and, oddly, the songs of birds. We walk past house after crumbling house, each displaying a plaque bearing the name of a family or business. Here was the tailor's shop, there the wine and spirits store. Here was the home of the Brissaud family. I pointed out to Lindsay the evidence that life was once lived within these disintegrating walls: a rusted sewing machine, the twisted remains of a bicycle. I wonder, does she feel the ghosts?

I suddenly realize that on June 10, 1944, the day it happened, I was exactly the age that she is today. I think of how I was experiencing the war in 1944, in the "dim-out" of a New York suburb, making great balls of aluminum foil, flattening out tin cans, observing "Meatless Tuesdays," taking the bus because gas was rationed, and anticipating the day when the war would end and the boys, including my older brother, would come home at last. On June 10th, we were optimistic and excited for the Allied invasion of Europe had taken place only five days earlier, and everyone was saying that soon the Germans would be driven out of the occupied countries and the war in Europe would be over. V-E Day could not be far off.

In spite of the fact that war, at once frightening and exciting, albeit distant, seemed to dominate our lives, I have no doubt that on June 10, 1944, my thirteenth birthday twelve days hence assumed far more importance in my mind. Now, in Oradour many years later, I wonder how many thirteen-year-old girls were living here when the Germans ordered the people to assemble in the village square. Everyone in the village went willingly, unsuspecting. Everyone. Every man, woman, and child who was in the village on that afternoon. Unknowing,

they walked for the last time out of these stone skeletons that were then their homes and shops, and joined their neighbors walking to the village square. Did the young girls walk together, I wonder, giggling and whispering as young girls do?

A white horse is standing behind the village wall bordering the main street. We stop to reach over the wall to pet him. I stroke the end of his nose, the spot between his nostrils so soft to the touch. He is so alive, so innocent and unaware. Lindsay wants to linger here by the horse, but I want to visit the church, the place where it happened.

There is no reason; there is only response.

After the people were gathered in the square, the men were led away and taken to a barn. The women were ordered into the church. According to the report of one of the three survivors, it was only at this point that the villagers began to feel some apprehension.

All the men were shot. The women and children were enclosed in the church, where a fire bomb was exploded, causing them all to burn to death. Only one woman and two men survived; in all 642 people died that day.

Lindsay and I entered the church with its crumbling altar and charred walls. This was their house of worship, where they celebrated Mass and marriage, rejoiced in their children's baptisms, and found solace as they buried their dead. This place, the center of their community and spiritual life, became in the end a place of hopeless terror beneath the image of Jesus in agony on the cross over the altar, dying as they were dying.

After the people had been killed, all the buildings in the village were burned. When General de Gaulle visited Oradour after the war, he decided that the ruins should be preserved as a memorial, so that future generations might remember. A new village of Oradour-sur-Glane was built not far from the ruins.

It has never been determined why Oradour was singled out for such murderous madness. The town had not experienced any brutality from the Germans prior to June 10th. The reason, if such a word can be applied to the horror, remains a mystery lingering like a ghost among the ruins.

There is a shop outside the gate selling literature about the massacre. I purchase two booklets, one for each of us, entitled "The Tragedy Hour by Hour." I hope Lindsay will read it, for I cannot speak to her about this place—at least not now. A chasm of more than fifty years lies between her experience of the day and mine. Decades that I have lived since June 10, 1944—years that those other thirteen-year-olds, the ones who giggled perhaps on their way to the square, never knew. I think of those years with wonder, and the great question arises: "Why?" Why do the birds sing in the trees here, and why does the white horse with the soft nose graze behind the wall among the ruins? Why am I the one standing in the sunshine on a Sunday afternoon in France? The questions, the mystery, hang like a shroud over the crumbling walls and rusting vehicles, and over my mind.

Then, from somewhere deep within me, an answer comes: "There is no reason; there is only response." I become aware that in an inexplicable way I am connected to it all—to the birds singing, to the shells of the homes, and especially to those whose lives were so cruelly snatched from them on that day many years ago. I feel a

strange sense of responsibility, a new awareness of the fragility of the gift of life. I regret every moment lived without gratitude for the treasure entrusted to me. I vow to live the remainder of my life passionately and well, for the sake of those who cannot as well as for myself. I have been given so much life, so many years. The words of Jesus echo in my mind: "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded."

I want to tell Lindsay that she is a member of the future generations for whom this place has been preserved, that she might remember. That she might learn from it that life is full of wonder but fragile, comprised of nothing less than single moments to be lived deeply, with joy and gratitude. I say nothing, but pray that she will not forget this hour in Oradour.

The Only Support We Need

Sant Rajinder Singh

A story from India tells of two farmers named Macchar and Ramditta. Both were steeped in the love of their spiritual master. They would not start their daily duties until they had sat in meditation for several hours and had seen the radiant form of the spiritual master within. One day during the corn season their faith was tested. As farmers it was their turn to get their share of irrigation water. On that particular day they sat in meditation for a long time but were unable to see the radiant form of their master within. As they kept sitting they felt pulled in two directions. One of them quietly said, "Macchar, what should we do? I am not yet seeing the spiritual master within today." The other replied, "I, too, am having trouble seeing the master within. I don't want to get up

Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Mararaj is author of Inner and Outer Peace through Meditation *and* Empowering Your Soul Through Meditation *both published by Element Books. An international spiritual leader and teacher of meditation, Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj affirms the transcendent oneness at the heart of all religions and emphasizes prayer and meditation as building blocks for achieving peace. For more information contact Science of Spirituality at* www.sos.org .

until we see the radiant form, but if we do not get the water our crops will die!" They sat silently wondering for a moment what to do. Ramditta eventually spoke, "Let the crops die for they belong to our spiritual master and God. It is all in their hands." They returned to their meditation and suddenly the radiant form of the spiritual master appeared to both of them.

How many of us would sit with such devotion? A professional athlete is continually doing the exercises that will help win the competition. A businessperson is constantly focused on the work that will result in profit. Similarly, an awakened person is ever aware

Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Mararaj leads a Peace March through Dehli, India.

of how he or she must practice to achieve spiritual union with God.

The great Sufi saint, Baba Farid, was once seen standing up, leaning against his staff. A short while later his face turned pale and he suddenly threw away his staff. People asked him, "What caused you to become pale and throw away your staff?" Baba Farid answered, "As I was standing that way, God said to me, 'Farid! Why do you seek another support besides Me?' When the Lord said that, I immediately threw away my staff and in awe of the Lord I turned pale."

God is the only support we need. If we would but put in time for regular meditation, lead an ethical life, and do selfless service, we could find all the comfort and support we need for the pains and sorrows of this world.

To meditate find a quiet spot and sit in any pose that is comfortable. Meditation is a process whereby we withdraw our attention from the outer world and concentrate it at the seat of the soul. We should close our eyes gently and look straight ahead, focusing our attention in the middle of the darkness lying in front of us. That which sees the darkness is not our physical eyes, but is the third or single eye located between and behind the eyebrows. Continue to gaze into the middle of whatever lies in front, and repeat silently and mentally any name of God. This repetition will keep the mind occupied and prevent it from wandering. With time we will experience the Light of God. When Light or inner vistas appear, keep the attention focused. As we meditate, we will begin to experience the reservoir of peace within, and we will be able to spread this peace to others.

Prayer 1

Thomas Albritton

When I actually speak,
It's often like asking things of myself.
Surely God isn't bound to my
Small corner of the English world.
A farmer's accent with well-trained
Phrases, "Heavenly father...Thy will be done."
Splashes of King James, "Giveth...granteth."
All kinds of dramatic asking,
And then the silences, when words
Give way to visitations, keeping company,
A quiet knowing, or rather a not-needing
To know, a waiting, listening, watching
That leads to a wordless, mutual gratitude.
Light a candle, hands folded together,
Here's the church, here's the steeple.
I have all that I will ever need.
Sometimes, I pray just to remember that.

Thomas Albritton lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Robert F. Campbell

Meditation Class

Michele Russo

If you ask me,
I've already forgotten
What tonight was about.

I think it was
The voice of the Earth
Dancing through my chest.

I think it was
Two gods
Talking shop.

I think it was
Dissonant praise
Discordant celebration.

I think I heard
My life drop
In the silence between sounds.

I think I heard
The world
Break into millions of pieces
And slowly
Reassemble itself.

Michele J. Russo works and lives in the Princeton, New Jersey area.
Jerome McElroy is an academic economist with a research specialty in the development problems of small tropical islands. He lives in Indiana.

Christopher

Jerome L. McElroy

From year to year his liturgies
were uniformly simple—a make-
shift chasuble and technicolor stole,
wine glass faintly cracked,
and off-key kyries disguising
the crescendo of grace.

Although he had been saying mass
in every room around the house
since he was nine, I can't recall
the moment we began to listen.
It crept like a silent season
shy to surprise.

Gradually between us
pieces of his homilies tumbling
from his broken tongue would
ripen underneath our skins
and surface serendipitously
in casual conversation.

But nothing paralleled his sermon
on the Prodigal at twelve.
He drew from the chaos
when his only sister ran away.
Then we knew it was through
his hope in the Father's longing looks

that brought her whole and home
to an endless summer.

BOOKS WE'VE ENJOYED

The Secret Life of Bees, Sue Monk Kidd, Published by Viking, 2002, 312 pages. Order through local bookstores or www.penguinputnam.com.

All Lily Owens has of her mother fits into a brittle paper bag. A photograph, some gloves and a small wooden picture of a black Madonna are the spare clues this Southern fourteen-year-old must unpack to make sense of her secret-riddled past. Add some bees, introduce the irresistible beekeeping Boatwright sisters, stir in a good measure of women's wisdom, and you have the recipe for *The Secret Life of Bees*.

Before turning to fiction Sue Monk Kidd wrote the widely acclaimed *When the Heart Waits: Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions* and *Dance of the Dissent Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine*. The content of her previous books becomes the air breathed by Sue's fully-drawn characters. My favorite is May, a woman so vulnerable that she builds her own private wailing wall where she can tuck in scraps of paper as prayers for her wounded life and this suffering world.

The story is set in the South just as the Civil Rights Act is passed– a verdant backdrop for this classic tale of a motherless child who goes in search of love and spiritual nurture in an often unforgiving world. Lily's voice provides a perfect mix of innocence and humor

for describing the pains of self-discovery and spiritual longing that just aren't always met in her father's Baptist church. When Lily first sees the three-foot-tall statue of Mary in the Boatwright's living room, Lily says, "The lips on the statue had a beautiful, bossy half smile, the sight of which caused me to move both my hands up to my throat. Everything about that smile said, Lily Owens, I know you down to the core."

An abridged audio version of the book is available and Kidd's lyric use of language should make this a pleasure to hear as well as read.

God Within: Our Spiritual Future—As Told By Today's New Adults, Edited by John Sweeney and the Editors at Skylight Paths. Published by Skylight Paths, 2001. To order call (800) 962-4544 or visit www.skylightpaths.com .

The authors of *God Within* were born after 1974 and were handed a legacy of spiritual adventuring by their Baby Boomer parents, many of whom left organized religion. Most of these authors grew up without a fixed boundary to rail against. Instead they forge ahead gathering what they can along the way.

Eboo Patel is the executive director of the Interfaith Youth Core. He writes, "My generation lives at the crossroads of inheritance and discovery. We are Muslims who admire the Dalai Lama and Christians who talk about karma. Our challenge is to be true to ancient traditions while living on the frontiers of modernity." At the heart of each essay is a struggle to identify what to embrace from one's upbringing and what to cast aside.

Pamela Dawn DeForest felt torn between the

Christian Science beliefs of her mother and her angry agnostic father. She searched for her own beliefs and at thirteen she recalls, "I met a Witch in a bulletin board chat room on my computer and found that I had found someone like me." Lauren Winner was raised an Orthodox Jew but felt "Jesus had been tugging at my long, modest skirts" for a long time. When she made an appointment to talk to a minister, he told her to stay a Jew. Lauren did convert and has found that "Judaism has conditioned how I read Scripture, and how I pray, and who I think Jesus is."

Sumi Loundon spent her earliest years in a Soto Zen community in New Hampshire. Sumi followed her father's advice to explore many religions . She writes, "I had, to some extent, a case of spiritual indigestion."

One essay, "Two Stars" by Elizabeth Ochs, draws a picture of sustaining faith in our multi-faith world. After leaving her Jewish day school in the Northeast for a public school in the South, she must live in a new religious arena world. One night on a bus ride home after a track meet, most of the girls began singing, "I'd Rather Have Jesus than Silver or Gold." Elizabeth writes, "Sing along, I told myself; go ahead and sing about Jesus. You won't be struck by lightning." Between verses, one of the girls asks her, "Hey, what's your God's name?" The next verse was sung warmly with "Hashem" inserted. Elizabeth writes, "I realized that although we sang from different backgrounds and headed home to different lives, we could find common spirit."

Those over forty should read this book for a visceral look into the new, often-confusing, multi-faith world inhabited by today's new adults. This is a generation capable of defining its own spiritual lives and, ready or not, tasked with casting a spiritual vision textured enough to hold the future.

~Rebecca Laird

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